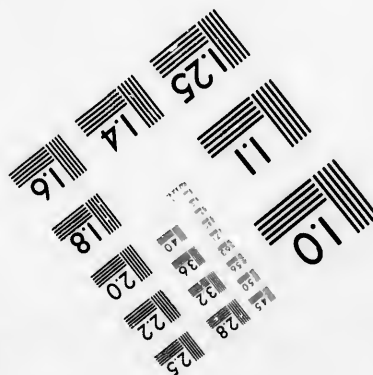
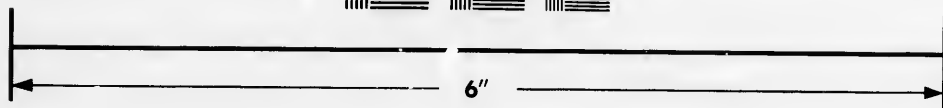
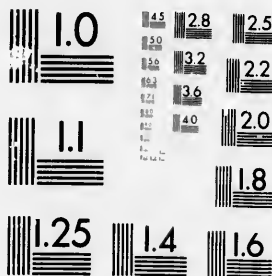


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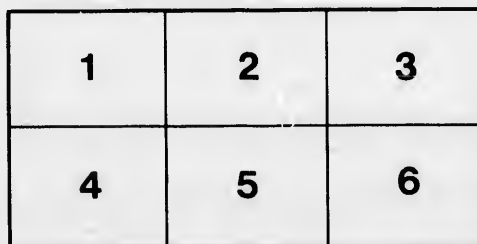
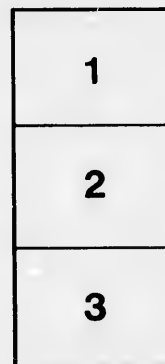
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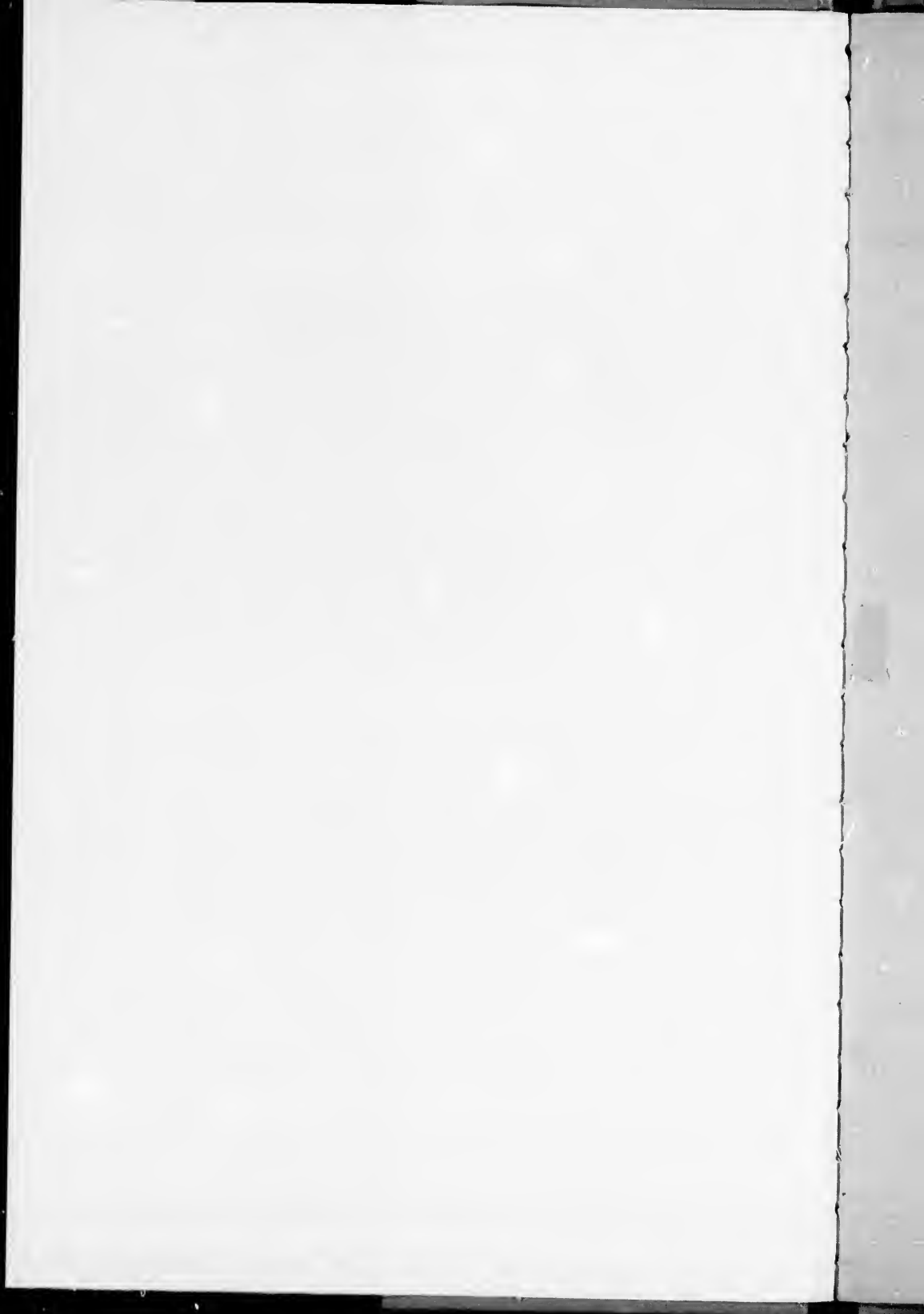
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Sabbath Observance

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The Ground and Scope of
Legislation Thereon

A Sermon

By

The Rev. Principal King, D.D.



SABBATH OBSERVANCE

AND

THE GROUND AND SCOPE OF
LEGISLATION THEREON

A SERMON

BY

THE REV. PRINCIPAL KING, D.D.

Preached in St. Stephen's Church, Winnipeg.

April 17th, 1898, and published by request.

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NOTE

Since this discourse was delivered, the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba has passed upon the bill presented by the Lord's Day Alliance, and in doing so, has declined to prohibit games or sports in public places on the Lord's day, except where these are publicly advertised and charges of admission made; a provision happily uncalled for at present and one which by its implication may even be pernicious. The subject is one, on which legislation is attended with a good deal of difficulty, and when all the circumstances are taken into account, there is probably not much reason for surprise at the action taken; though there is the best reason for believing that it is not in accord with the prevailing sentiment regarding the day entertained by the people of the Province. Should the disposition to indulge in sports and games on the day be persisted in, and especially, should it be carried further, as there is reason to fear, the friends of the Sabbath—those who believe in its sacredness, will take the care to present to the legislature a very different expression of public opinion on the subject, from that on the recent occasion, which it has found easy to disregard. But the most desirable issue would be that those who do not esteem the day a sacred one, should have such regard for the feelings of those who do, as to refrain from public sports and games on that day and in this way render attempts at legislation of this kind, always more or less provocative of opposition and ill feeling, unnecessary.

Exodus, 20, 8 : "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

Mark 2, 27 : "The Sabbath was made for man."

In speaking to you this evening, as I have been asked to do, on the subject of Sabbath observance, it may be taken for granted that the great majority of those whom I address, if not indeed all, regard the Sabbath law as one of permanent obligation, modified as to its temper and spirit under the Gospel, but in its substance as binding now as it was in the days of Moses or of David. It may not be amiss, however, in a single word or two, to state the grounds or some of them, on which the permanent obligation of a seventh day of rest is maintained. First, the primary design of the commandment, as appears from its terms, was to secure for man and beast even, a regularly recurring season of physical rest. So far then as the Sabbath law has its foundation in the need which man's physical nature has of rest and change, it is obvious that it must be of permanent obligation. The Sabbath or the Rest-day (on whatever day of the week observed) cannot therefore be classed with those institutions which are of local or temporary obligation. Assuredly the need of it does not become less, as the world grows older, and the strain put upon those who are toiling in the various departments of labor, becomes more intense. We can better understand, how the shepherds and vine-growers of Bible lands could have dispensed with a weekly day of rest, than the merchants, statesmen and artisans of our own day. Second, the need of a seventh day of rest has its ground in man's spiritual nature, as well as in his physical. All experience goes to show that, if the religious sentiment within man, is to have justice done to it, there must be stated times for acts of worship; busy men must be from time to time reminded of the existence and claims of a higher world of truth and reality through the stopping at regular and not too distant intervals of the wheels of business. Perhaps it is not too much to say with a distinguished thinker belonging to another church and nationality, "There is no

religion without worship, and there is no worship without the Sabbath." But if the observance has thus also its grounds in the needs of man's spiritual nature, obviously these continue under the Gospel as under the law. The Christian can no more dispense with stated observances of worship and with stated times for these observances, than could those who lived under the patriarchal or the Mosaic dispensation. If these considerations as lying at the ground of the seventh day of rest have force, it is easy to believe, it is difficult not to believe, that the Sabbath was not first instituted at Sinai, that it is as old as man. Scripture confirms this view. "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work, which he had made and God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it." The very word with which the commandment is introduced points in the same direction. "*Remember* the Sabbath day to keep it holy." The argument for the perpetuity of the Sabbath rest is further strengthened by the place assigned to it in the Decalogue, or law of the ten commandments. It is not questioned that all the other nine commandments are of universal obligation, are in force everywhere and always. On what ground, with what show of reason, can the tenth, *i.e.*, the fourth, be held to be local and temporary? The argument for the permanent character of the institution is clinched by the Saviour's words, "The Sabbath was made for man," not for the Jew as a Jew, but for the Jew as a man, for man as man, with a physical, intellectual and moral nature—for man, and, therefore, to continue as long as he has his dwelling place, the scene of his existence, in this world of toil and conflict and temptation and sorrow; an obligation, indeed, but still more a privilege, and if rightly used, a benediction and a joy.

But I am expected to speak to you to-night for a few minutes, not on the general question of Sabbath observance—on the obligation under which the Christian is laid to keep the day holy, but on the specific point as to the extent, if any, to which in a Christian community, legislation may be employed to protect the day or to further its observance. There are really two questions involved, if legislation is

allowable at all in connection with the subject, (and with inconsiderable exceptions, this seems to be admitted on all hands), viz., 1st. How far may legislation go, or ought it to go. 2nd. On what grounds should it proceed. The two questions are very closely connected. The second is the more important not only because it is the really determinative one, but because on the way it is answered, many very vital issues for the well-being of the state depend. It must, therefore, receive attention first.

On what grounds or grounds should any legislation regarding the Sabbath or the Lord's day, or Sunday proceed.

The position has been taken by not a few, probably by the majority in this discussion, that it is the public good as ascertained solely by the light of nature, by experience, by that reason which is common to all men, on which any legislation regarding the Sabbath should be based; and in particular that it is not competent for a civil society to base any part of its legislation on divine revelation, whether in the way of direct appeal to it, or as the result of the belief which the legislative body, or those who choose its members, have in the contents of revelation. In other words, and as applied to the present subject, the legislature may enact a law requiring complete cessation of ordinary labor on the seventh day, on the ground that it has been found that such cessation of labor contributes to individual and public well-being; but it is precluded by its character as a civil body, from having regard in such enactment to the fact that the commandment of God requires that every seventh day shall be a rest day. This latter is solely for the guidance of the individual in his private capacity, and for the church of which he may be a member. The state as such may not have regard to it, in its legislative or administrative action. Now, I wish, without meaning to reflect on any one whatever, to enter my strong and decided dissent against this view of the state, as in my humble opinion indefensible in principle, and as not unlikely, if followed consistently out, to lead to issues which all good men will regret. This contention is something more than, and something entirely different from, the separation of church and state; a separation which is admittedly demanded in the

best interests alike of church and state. To say that the state in its legislative and administrative action is to be governed wholly by the light of nature, is to have nothing to do with religion, is to have no regard to the revealed will of God, is another thing altogether from saying that there should be no alliance between church and state; this is secularism pure and simple. I ask you, to reject it on these grounds :

First. It proceeds on a wrong view of the state. The state is not a voluntary association of persons within a certain area. It is a natural organism, with a distinct national life, a distinct character, distinct principles of action, into which there necessarily must enter, if the majority of the people are Christian people, believers in revelation, distinctively Christian convictions, ideas gained from Scripture, and to be gained nowhere else. But in a free country like ours, legislation must follow the mind and will of the people, must be the expression of its collective wisdom. It is impossible, therefore, and would be wrong and unnatural if it were possible, that these Christian ideas should not in such circumstances more or less color both legislative and administrative action. It is certainly a question, sometimes a difficult one, to what extent these ideas can be wisely and profitably crystallized in legislation; but to ask the legislator in a Christian country to forget what he has learned from his Bible and follow only the light of nature, when he is making laws for the people's well-being, is, in my humble opinion, indefensible. I repeat again that the state is as much as the family, a natural organism, an ordinance of God, and to clothe it with a character in which the recognition of God in its official action would be an impropriety, through whatever experiences of adversity or of prosperity the nation might be passing, is only less monstrous than is the fact of a godless home in a Christian land—a home, where God's name is not spoken from Sunday morning till Saturday night.

Second—This conception of the state, according to which it must hold itself wholly clear of the domain of Revelation in its legislative action, admits of no adequate basis for a seventh day of rest, such as many of those who hold it, seek to

maintain. The light of nature, while no doubt showing us the need and the benefit of recurring periods of rest, does not teach us that these should come every seventh day, not every sixth or every eighth. I am not aware that this has ever been scientifically proved, or that it is capable of scientific proof. The discarded Bible must therefore be brought in, in a side way, or the ideas of those who bow to it, before a seventh day of rest can get a foothold in any community. How long would it maintain itself but for the religious character with which the day is invested to earnest believing minds in the commonwealth? The untenableness of this view of the state is even more distinctly seen by reference to another enactment. The christian nations of Europe and America have without exception pronounced against polygamy, have enacted that marriage must be that of one man to one woman. On what ground? Mainly on the ground of the teaching of Jesus Christ on the subject. If an effort were made to change the law, to permit, let us say, Mormons to practise their polygamous doctrines under the shadow of the Rockies, will any man say that a legislator, who offered resistance to the measure on the ground that it was in violation of the teaching of our Lord, was forgetting what was proper to him in his legislative capacity? Something may be learned surely from the Bible as to the foundation of national well-being, even if we should also consult Smith and Bentham and Buckle. It was, let me remark in passing, strange to get on a recent occasion long extracts from Leckie and Buckle, both of them Rationalists of the extreme type, to guide a Manitoba legislature in regard to the question of Sabbath observance. It recalled the almost forgotten fact, that this same Buckle in his learned work on civilization, places Scotland next to Spain as occupying the lowest stage of civilization among the nations of Europe. Next after Spain, he has told the world, Scotland is the most priest-ridden country in Europe, a statement which not unnaturally elicited the remark from a canny Scot that he would like well to see Mr. Buckle try to ride some of his countrymen.

Third. The view of the state which I am combating, according to which it must base its legislation on considerations wholly outside of revelation, is opposed to the prevailing, if

not the all but universally entertained views of the Presbyterian Church on both sides of the Atlantic. Take Dr. Hodge as an exponent of American sentiment, "As the government cannot violate the moral law in its own action, (and the remark is made in connection with the fourth commandment) or require the people to violate it, so neither can it ignore Christianity in its official action." Take Principal Cairns, a pronounced voluntary as regards church and state connection, as an exponent of British opinion, "I hold that we are doing justice to our principles, to the universal creed of the church, and to the greatest and wisest teachers among voluntaries in the past, when we say 'that magistrates, as well as other men are under obligation to submit themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to regulate their conduct in their several places and relations by His Word.' As to the duty of the civil magistrate to further the interests of the religion of Christ among his subjects in every way consistent with its spirit and enactment, that proposition can be denied only by the man who holds in the most absolute, entire, unrestricted sense, that with religion the civil magistrate has nothing to do; because if he has to do with religion, he must have to do with it, in the way not of opposing it but of furthering it."

I come to the conclusion that the ground on which legislation in regard to the Sabbath should proceed, is not simply the general good of the community as learned by the light of nature, but along with this, the law of God bearing thereon, so far as that may be properly embodied in legislative enactment. There are, obviously enough, aspects of Sabbath observance which no one would dream of making matter of human legislation. No one would think of making church attendance imperative, since such constraint could only work harm instead of good, besides being a plain infringement of the rights of conscience. But so far as securing the cessation of labor not required by necessity and mercy, and providing facilities for the worship of God, legislation regarding a seventh rest-day in a Christian country may, and ought to be based, not merely on utilitarian considerations learned from sociological studies, but on the commandment in which the God-given right to cease from labor is laid down. It is only

by thus incorporating Christian ideas in our national life that we can come to have a civilization distinctively Christian, and which, let us be thankful, the civilization which obtains among us, with all its defects, really is.

As to the second point, the extent to which Sabbath legislation should be carried, there is not time to speak at length, and perhaps it is less necessary. There is happily little difference in the community as to securing by legislation a day of rest from ordinary labor on the first day of the week. Even those who refuse to look at the divine commandment in this connection, are on other grounds prepared to forbid unnecessary labor on that day. We have all an interest in such legislation being made effective, those who work with their brains, as those who work with their hands. Testimonies out of number might be produced on this point, not the least impressive from that great and noble statesman who, after so many years of distinguished service of his country, is now slowly passing from us. Sir David Wilkie says: "Those artists who wrought on Sunday were soon disqualified from working at all." Wilberforce tells us, "He never could have sustained the labour and stretch of mind required in his early political life, if it had not been for the rest of the Sabbath." The laboring class in particular have an interest in the preservation of the weekly day of rest; and the most thoughtful of the class must be well aware that it is the religious sentiment of the community in which the chief security for its preservation is found.

But how about the permission of amusements and sports on the Lord's day? It is just here where the main difficulty has arisen and it is especially in this connection that the need of more specific legislation has made itself felt. One may well regret that any such need should have arisen. I dislike restrictive legislation on all such matters, and would very greatly prefer to have a fairly orderly Sabbath, such as we have had in this city, not as the result of legislative prohibitions but as the outcome of the general sentiment of the community. The blame I fear must be laid at the door of those, who within the last year or two, have claimed the right practically to legitimise pleasure excursions and the playing of games in

public places on the Christian Sabbath. The form, golf, is probably the least offensive, but in principle it carries with it the legitimisation of football, cricket or any other form of innocent sport. Now I regret exceedingly the alternative which is forced on me as a citizen of this community, either on the one hand of acquiescing in the legitimizing of pleasure excursions, and of games of sport in the open spaces in and around our city on the Lord's day, or on the other of seeking to initiate restrictive legislation which can so easily become productive of bad feeling. But if the alternative is forced on me, I have as a Christian citizen, interested in the well-being of the community no choice. The reason can be stated in a few words. I believe, in common with all Christian people and with many even who are not Christians, that the well-being of the state is bound up with the presence in it of an earnest, healthful, vigorous religious life—that religion is the strongest support, if not indeed the only secure basis of morality—that it is this, which more than all else tends to make industrious, orderly, law-abiding citizens, and thus to build up a prosperous commonwealth. Then, if there is anything whatever of which I am fully assured, it is this, that the allowance of excursions and the practice of games and sports on the Christian Sabbath would lower the tone and impair the force of religious life all over. It is quite true that Sabbath keeping is not religion, not by a long way; but it is impossible to deny that the use of the cricket ground and the football field on the day hitherto kept free for rest and worship; that the opening of the theatre alongside of the church on the Lord's day, would have as its result the decay of spiritual life—the deterioration of the religious sentiment in the community. I am aware that those who are opposing us are loud in their protestations that they do not desire open theatres or races or games where fees of admission should be charged, and I give them full credit for sincerity in so speaking; but if you legitimise a principle, it is not left with you to arrest its application at the point where you might desire; others will give it new and undesired applications, and in the meantime, you have thrown away the only weapon by which they could be successfully met. If the question therefore, is thrust upon

us to-day, as to whether the Sabbath is to continue to be among us a day of rest, and for Christian people, or those desiring to be such, a day of worship, or is to become for those who have other tastes, a day for sports, then I am bound to give my voice for the former, and for the disallowance of the latter. We cannot expect those to share our strong feelings on this subject who have grown up under irreligious influences, nor those even who have, in the days of doubt and unsettled faith in which our lot is cast, had to break with the Christian faith in order, as they think, to preserve their integrity—some of them if we knew all, more entitled to our sympathy than our blame. But one may cherish the hope that if not all, yet the bulk of the Christian people, will be one with us in the effort to preserve the day from such desecration as that, with which it has been overtaken in more lands than one, and with which it appears to be threatened in our own. I may be permitted to add, that the disallowance of public sports or amusements on the Lord's day is very closely connected with its preservation as a day of rest from labor. For myself, I do not understand the state of public sentiment, do not see how it could be justified, or even exist, which would fine or imprison a man for hoeing his potatoes on the Lord's day, or carrying in his grain, while it looked with indifference on the football club or the baseball club playing in the adjoining field.

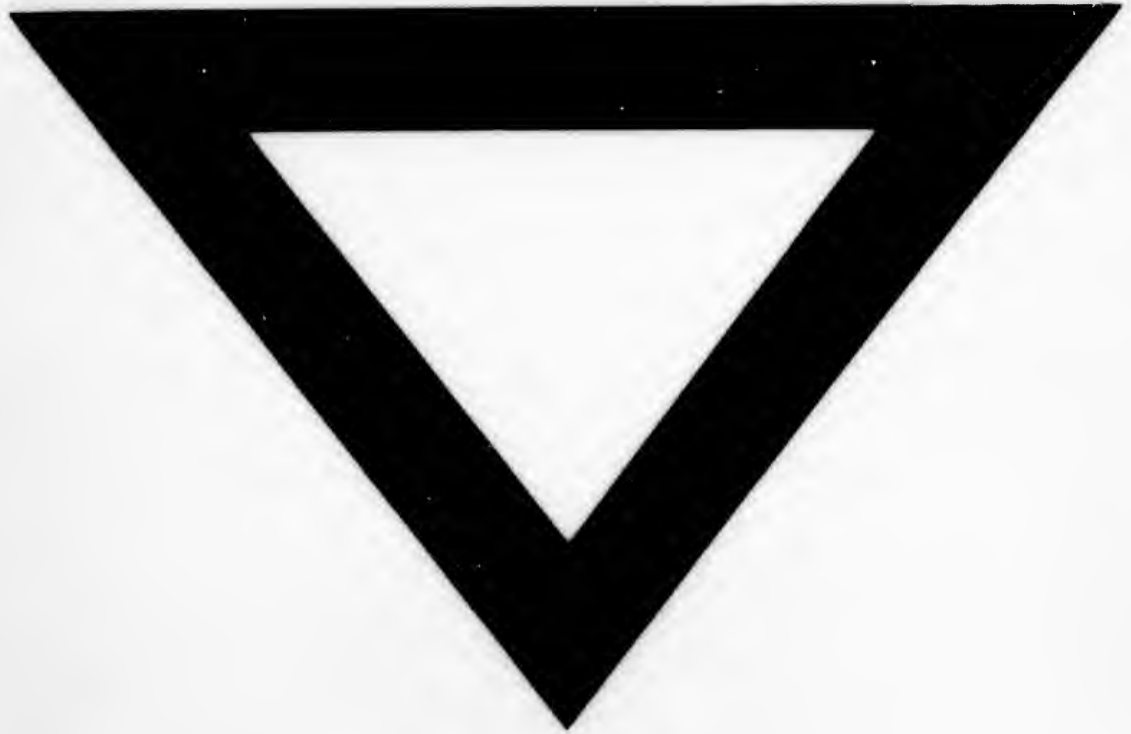
In speaking as I have done on this subject, it is unnecessary to say, that I do not claim to speak with any authority—any, that is, except such as may spring from convictions not hastily adopted and very strongly cherished. If any brethren in the ministry in our own church or in sister churches see the matter in a different light, I claim for them as for myself, the full right to speak, as the light given them and their consciences dictate. I may say, however, that I have spoken with the greater confidence to-night, as the views presented are in the line of the prevailing testimony of the Presbyterian church. Before closing I wish to say two things. First. The Churches, if they are to do their duty to those tied down to long hours of labor on the one hand, and to Sabbath observance on the other, ought to take a far deeper and more effective interest

in securing either on Saturday or some other day of the week, a half holiday or some hours release from toil to those, to whom at present the Lord's day is the only day of relaxation. For the church to guard the Sabbath and at the same time to look on with indifference, while there are classes in the community toiling, as we are told, some do from early morning till late evening, and from Monday to Saturday, is to leave a very important part of her work undone. I am willing to say that there has been remissness here, and to take my share of the blame. Certainly those who are seeking to have shorter hours of labor, and more frequent of opportunities for relaxation on week days, are entitled to the sympathy and aid of the Church of Christ.

Lastly, I have said and I repeat it, the Sabbath ought to be esteemed by us as a privilege even more than an obligation. It is a beneficent institution. More than most institutions it bears on it the stamp of divine love as well as of divine wisdom. I do not believe its observance, even its strict observance, means lessened pleasure. On the contrary, I believe that its observance will only make our secular occupations and amusements a source of greater pleasure to us on the days when they are appropriate. I believe the child will have more enjoyment from his toys who is taught to lay them aside one day in the week. The man will find most enjoyment in his morning paper or in his literary studies who sweeps his table of all secular reading on the morning of the Lord's day. The merchant will certainly have the most vigor of mind and body for his business on the Monday morning, who refuses to give it a moment's consideration on the day God has given us for rest and worship. Obedience to any command of God brings blessing with it; but all history will show, obedience to this command has been signally blessed. Countless instances attest the truth of the divine declaration in this connection, "Them that honor me, I will honor." Wherefore, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

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His cause. Very far was the zeal of this revered servant of God from being that of the mere Churchman or partizan, bent on the advancement of his own Church or party without any very much better reason than that it is his own. It was only necessary to have a very slight intimacy with his inner life, in order to gain the deep and delightful conviction that a high appreciation of gospel truth and a profound sympathy with what is highest and most valuable in religious life, underlay and ennobled the unceasing activity which marked his entire course. And as a consequence, while he was eager in his attachment to his own branch of the Church of Christ, he rejoiced in indications of spiritual life, wherever they appeared, and he loved, his heart warmed in these later years, as many of us can testify, to good men of every name. But whatever its character and spring, work was his joy; a task to some, a duty to others, it was a necessity to him. And he wrought to the last. The illness which cut him off had assumed a form, that was quite alarming and might have been almost immediately fatal, before it took the pen from his hand. There was great mercy in this for one so constituted; but one Sabbath laid aside from active duty and left free to hold quiet converse with the invisible, and ere another dawned, the door opened and he was called to enter. "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing."

Very closely connected with the preceding, and yet entitled to a separate place in even an imperfect analysis of his character, was the breadth of interest by which as a Minister of the word and Professor of Theology in the Canada Presbyterian Church, the deceased